

OCTOBER - BLACK HISTORY MONTH

If it's October, it's Black History Month (BHM). First celebrated in the UK in London in 1987 its reach has long spread well beyond just activities in the capital. Organisations and individuals will be celebrating the achievements of great Black people in history and today throughout the month. Black people in the UK are part of British culture and have contributed to the country's prosperity, society and culture. However, Black British history is often marginalised and because of this for some people it may be the only time they are interested in Black history. This means that BHM is still necessary, important and relevant.

UNISON members should be marking BHM every year in their branches and regions. As well as this being a time to acknowledge achievements, BHM also provides an opportunity to discuss wider issues affecting the Black community and this alone creates a perfect opportunity to organise and recruit!

Ideas for Black History Month events

Organise a screening

There are plenty of educational and inspirational films – features and shorts – about Black History, Black culture or profiling great Black people. Organising an event like this is easy and need not have huge cost implications.

Things to consider

- Promote the event early. Use all methods to promote and send reminders.
- Licensing – check what the requirements are and check with your employer what is already in place.
- You could consider inviting someone connected to the film to talk.
- You could ask Black members for suggestions on what to screen but to get you going some suggestions are: Pressure, I am man, The proud valley (1940), 7 songs for Malcom X, Territories, I'm British But, Windrush: a British history (can be shown over a period of time).

Do some research

Find out what the issues are for Black members in your workplace. Identify any patterns of discrimination and



investigate, asking your employer and colleagues about it. This could be about redundancies, promotions, grading, grievances and disciplinarys or bullying and harassment.

BULLYING
IT WON'T
END
UNLESS
YOU DO
SOMETHING
ABOUT IT

The research could take the form of questionnaires, surveys or Freedom of Information requests to the employer. An event can be used to present the findings and begin discussion on an action plan.

Things to consider

- This is a lot for one person to do alone so put together a working group.

Invite a speaker or have a reading

An event like this can take place in a lunch hour to increase attendance. Invite a speaker to talk on a subject of

expertise or to talk about a report or book they have written.

Things to consider

- Picking a topical subject or one relevant to Black workers in your workplace will increase attendance.

Hold a talent showcase or entertainment event

These events can involve poetry, presentations, speakers, dancers and food. Mixed events can include all types of entertainment and can engage a wide group of people.

Things to consider

- Events like this are lengthy and can be difficult for people to attend during the day.
- This type of event can be costly.

Black history month quiz

A quiz can prove educational and entertaining and is an easy way to cover information on a variety of subjects.

Things to consider

- Add variety to how the questions are presented by using pictures, music and video clips if possible.
- If you have good prizes then promote these when promoting the event.



- You may be able to get prizes donated for free if you are imaginative and approach the right people and organisations.

Hold a debate

There are various formats for a debate. They are great ways to engage people in discussion on a topic and offer information from different perspectives.



Things to consider

- Ensure a balanced panel that will represent viewpoints from both sides of any debate.
- A good compere will contribute to the organisation of the event and the opportunity for as many people to speak as possible

Exhibitions

If you have the space you could organise an exhibition. This could facilitate staff members to see an exhibition they may have missed or could showcase internal all local talent.

Things to consider

- Ask for ideas and contributions from the wider membership – you'll be surprised at the internal connections or talent
- Contact a local migration projects or similar community organisation often they have exhibitions in storage. For example, Action on South Africa has an archive exhibition that can be borrowed (see: www.aamarchives.org).

Cultural festival

By arranging a space for stalls and stands this event could be an opportunity to showcase food and craft from Black cultures all over the world.

Things to consider

- Check the food standards requirements if you want stalls serving food.

Organise a trip

Organise a trip to a relevant museum or a tour of a site with a guide.

Things to consider

- Your budget will determine the number of spaces available so be sure to let people know that spaces are limited and to take names as reserves.

Create a special newsletter

Creating an edition of a newsletter or circular dedicated to BHM can give you the space to profile great Black people, Black activists or Black members in your workplace.



Things to consider

- Getting members to contribute to this may engage new people in branch work and make the newsletter more interesting.

Tips for a successful event

- Involve your UNISON branch committee. They may be able to help with funds, plans, help and guidance for the event.
- Invite someone from the branch committee to say a few words and give information on how to get involved with the branch.
- Use the event to raise the profile of the branch and union. Make it clear it is organised by UNISON.
- Be prepared to talk about wider Black members issues and specific Black member issues in your branch and what you can do collectively.
- Invite everyone – members and non-members.
- Make sure you have promotional materials, leaflets and recruitment forms available.
- Take an attendance list so you can contact staff that did not join, promote another event or circulate follow-up information.
- Don't forget to promote your event. Use internal mail, notice boards, staff newsletters and meetings in advance and reminders closer to the event.
- Include refreshments – it helps with attendance!
- Take pictures and write up the event to raise the profile of your branch. Send the article to your region and to blackmembers@unison.co.uk so we can share good ideas.

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